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# A GENERAL EPISTLE TO FRIENDS;

To be Read in their Respective

## QUARTERLY AND MONTHLY MEETINGS.

By DAVID HALL.

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MDCCXL.

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# A GENERAL EPISTLE TO FRIENDS,

To be Read in their Respective Quarterly and Monthly Meetings.

Dear FRIENDS,

I Don't see that I can return clear and easie to my Habitation, except I leave this *farewell Epistle* behind me, whereby I tenderly salute you in much brotherly Kindness and Charity, and do humbly recommend the following Advices to the serious Consideration of the FATHERS, the YOUNG MEN, and the CHILDREN, being the three Degrees, Classes, or Ranks, in the *Church*, to which the beloved Apos-

cle *John* distinctly wrote; saying, * *I write unto you* Fathers, *because ye have known* him *that is from the Beginning*; *I write unto* young Men, *because ye have* overcome *the wicked One*; *I write unto you* little Children, *because ye have* known *the Father.*

*First*, You therefore *Fathers*, *Mothers*, *Elders*, and *Ministers* in the *Church*; I earnestly intreat you to come up faithfully in your respective Stations and Services in your Day and Generation, carefully watching and praying that nothing here below may unfit you for, or divert you from, the right Performance of your Duties to God and his People; but that ye may, in the pure Liberty of the *Spirit of Truth*, with true *Zeal* guarded by *divine Wisdom*, feed the Flock of God which is among you, taking the Oversight thereof, not by † *Constraint, but willingly; not for filthy Lucre, but of a ready Mind; neither as Lords over God's Heritage, but being Ensamples to the Flock; and when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a Crown of Glory that fadeth not away.*

Oh! Consider how many wrong things are crept and creeping in among the Professors of the *blessed Truth*, as *Pride*, *Covetousness*,

* 1 John [illegible] † 1 Pet. v, 2, 3, 4.

Covetous

*Conformity* to, and *Copying after*, this vain World, *Company-keeping*, and other hurtful Things, which 'tis your indiſpenſable Duty impartially to ſtand againſt, and endeavour as much as poſſible to redreſs, both by Precept and Precedent: And you *Parents* of Children, I fervently exhort to take a particular Care to bring up your *tender Off-ſpring* in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord, and to be in a Chriſtian Care and Concern for the Preſervation and Salvation of your Servants alſo, even as ye could deſire others might do to your Children, if they were their Servants; for, with the Lord, the Soul of the *Servant* is as the Soul of the *Maſter* or *Miſtreſs*.

And, oh! *Friends*, be nobly and warmly concern'd for the maintaining and keeping up of the honourable and neceſſary *Church Diſcipline* and *good Order* upon the right and true Foundation thereof, having the *Truth* at *Heart*, and your *Eye* ſolely to the Glory of God, and the Good of the *Society*; having no Reſpect of Perſons for the Sake of Friendſhip, Favour, Intereſt or Kinſhip, or any other Views whatſoever; for the Shepherds and Principal Men in the Flock the Pillars in the Church, who are as Stakes in the Hedge, muſt be well grounded, founded and rooted upon the Rock, and in the Root of Life eſtabliſh'd in the Faith and

practical Part of pure Religion; ſo that as ye ſit at the Helm of *Church Government* and *Diſcipline*, ye may really be under the Government and Diſcipline of the bleſſed Croſs of Chriſt; ſo ſpeak and ſo act as Men having Authority, and not as the *Scribes*. Thus will ye be directed and helped impartially, and in a chriſtian meek Spirit, to place due Judgment upon the Head of the *Tranſgreſſor*, and be a Terror to Evil-doers, and a Praiſe and Encouragement to thoſe who do well: Thus truly concern'd at your Hearts, you will find it your incumbent Duty, your great Satisfaction, and the Church's Inrereſt, after a *Fatherly* Manner, to labour with the Young and riſing Generation, and to train up and uſher in, example and encourage, the *Orderly* and *Religious* amongſt them, to attend *Monthly* and *Quarterly Meetings*; there not only to ſee and underſtand, but alſo, in the Wiſdom of *Truth*, to put their Hands and Hearts to the Management of the Affairs of the Church, that when it ſhall pleaſe the Lord to call the *Elders* off the Stage, they may depart in Peace, leaving the Care of God's Husbandry and Building in the Hands of hopeful well qualified, and well inſtructed Succeſſors, who will, by the Direction of the *good Husbandman* and *Maſter-builder*, labour to fence, plant, water, weed, and build up in the moſt holy Faith,

And,

And, oh! *dear Friends*, pray uſe your beſt Endeavours to ſuppreſs the Growth of *Pride*, and the vain Faſhions of the World in your reſpective Families and Meetings, in *Habit*, *Speech*, and *Deportment*; as alſo, that vile Practice of *Back-biting* and *Tale-bearing*, purſuant to the following Scriptures, *viz.* **Take us the Foxes, the little Foxes that ſpoil the Vines, for our Vines have tender Grapes. Thou ſhalt not go up and down as a* Tale-bearer *among thy People.* † *Thou ſhalt not raiſe a* falſe *Report* (or as in the Margin, receive a falſe Report) *Wherefore laying aſide all Malice, and all Guile, and Hypocriſies, and Envies, and Evil-ſpeaking, as new born Babes, deſire the Milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby.* Likewiſe, you *young Men* and *Women*, I cordially exhort you ſeriouſly to ponder in your Hearts theſe three Things, *viz.* the *End of your Creation*, *your own indiſpenſable Duty*, and *your moſt certain Intereſt annexed to the right Performance of your ſaid Duty, both touching this Life and the future*, and alſo, *the preſent Circumſtances of the Church*: Now as to the *firſt*, ye were created to glorify God, which ye cannot do, but by bringing forth the Fruits of the Spirit, § *Herein*, ſays Chriſt, *is my Father glorified, that ye bear much Fruit, ſo ſhall ye be my Diſciples.* Now this Fruit ye

* Cant. ii. 15. Lev. xix. 16. † Exod. xxiii. 1. 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2
§ John xv. 8.

cannot bring forth except ye take up a daily Croſs to the Fleſh (which is the oppoſite Root to the Spirit, and the Fruits of it) therefore, dear *young People*, bear the Croſs, that ye may wear the Crown, and by rightly applying to the Lord for the Help of his All-ſufficient Grace, that ſo, *ſecondly*, you may anſwer your Duty called for by the Father and the Son, *viz.* * *I will yet for this be inquired of by the Houſe of* Iſrael. † *Seek ye firſt the Kingdom of God and his Righteouſneſs, and all theſe Things ſhall be added unto you.* Which godly exerciſe is advantageous to all who are found in it, both as to this, and the other World, as is evidently manifeſt in the Apoſtle *Paul*'s fatherly Admonition to his Son *Timothy*, § *But refuſe*, ſays he, *prophane and old Wives Fables, and exerciſe thy ſelf rather unto Godlineſs, for bodily Exerciſe profiteth little; but Godlineſs is profitable unto all Things, having Promiſe of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come.*

So, *dear Friends*, as ye come under theſe due Conſiderations, ye cannot but with Regret, obſerve the State and dwindling Condition of the *Church* in divers Parts; how the Places of many of our *faithful Elders* and *Miniſters* up and down are empty, and few

* Ezek. xxxvi. 37. † Mat. vi. 33. § 1 Tim. iv. 7. 8.

ſeem

ſeem rightly concern'd to come under ſuitable Qualifications to ſucceed them, and come up in their Stations; which when we note, together with the looſe Courſes and undue Liberties of many who profeſs the *Truth*, who can but cry out with the afflicted Prophet *Jeremiah*, * *For the Hurt of the Daughter of my People am I hurt, I am black: Aſtoniſhment hath taken hold on me. Is there no Balm in* Gilead? *Is there no Phyſician there? Why then is not the Health of the Daughter of my People recovered.* And again, *Oh! that my Head were Waters, and mine Eyes a Fountain of Tears, that I might weep Day and Night for the Slain of the Daughter of my People*; and, oh! mind the Conſequences of ſwerving away from the *Truth* into *Libertiniſm*, in Chap. ix. 13, 14 15. *And the Lord ſaith, becauſe they have forſaken my Law which I have ſet before them, and have not obey'd my Voice, neither walked therein, but have walked after the Imagination of their own Hearts:* ——— *Therefore, thus ſaith the Lord of Hoſts, the God of* Iſrael, *behold I will feed them, even this People, with Wormwood, and give them Water of Gall to drink.* Oh! may we not ſometimes, and in ſome Places, take up a Lamentation much like unto this, in a Degree, † *The Ways of* Zion *do mourn, becauſe none come to*

* Jer viii. 21. 22. † Jer. 1. 4.

*the*

*the solemn Feasts: all her Gates are desolate, her Priests sigh, her Virgins are afflicted, and she is in Bitterness.* Therefore come away, oh! ye YOUTHS of this Generation I beseech you, come away from the Ends of the Earth, and from all earthly Ends, which would obstruct. Consider these Things, and let the Glory of God, the Salvation of your Souls, and the Service of the *Church* in this your Day, move you to arise from every Bed of Ease and false Rests, and make timely and suitable Application for a double Portion that good Spirit which dwelt in our *faithful Elders*, who were in their Day valiant for the *Truth* upon the Earth; that under these Qualifications, ye may duly fill their vacant Places, and brightly succeed them, as *Elisha* did *Elijah*—— Please to remember King *David*'s dying Advice to his Son *Solomon*, viz. * *And thou* Solomon *my Son, know thou the God of thy Father, and serve him with a perfect Heart, and with a willing Mind; for the Lord searcheth all Hearts and understandeth all the Imaginations of the Thoughts: If thou seek him, he will be found of thee, but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.*

Altho' the Visitation and loving Kindness of our merciful God be graciously extended

* 1 Chron xxviii 9.

to

to you, in order to make you truly happy and ſerviceable here, and to fit you for Glory hereafter; yet 'tis very plain, that the God of this World, the Prince of the Power of the Air, is exceeding buſie about you in theſe your flouriſhing Days, in order to blind that Eye which the Lord hath mercifully opened in you, and in cunningly laying divers Snares for your Feet: I beſeech you therefore by the Mercies of God, avoid *unſuitable Company*, which has often prov'd of pernicious Conſequences to many, both of the *Elder* and *Younger Rank*, by drawing them into Intemperance and exceſs of divers Kinds; the Source and Cauſe of many hurtful and pernicious Effects, both reſpecting Soul, Body, Eſtate and Reputation, as is too apparent by thoſe who follow it; it makes to them all Profeſſion of Religion null and void, and gradually darkeneth the Underſtanding, vitiates the Mind, and alienates it from God, and ſo deprives the Creature of the moſt comfortable Enjoyment of his Preſence in this World (the higheſt Attainment we are capable of arriving at here below;) and alſo macerates the Body, and fills it with many grievous Pains, and Infirmities; and too often renders ſuch unable to pay their juſt Debts, and reduces them to want, and many innocent Wives and Children, to the utmoſt Diſtreſs of Circumſtance, ſcarce to be retrieved in an Age

with

with the greateſt Diligence: Beſides, *Intemperance*, with its Conſequents, exceedingly degrade Men and Women, who have been of Credit and Reputation, and reduce them to a Level with the meaneſt part of Mankind, and bring a very great and heavy Reproach upon the religious Profeſſion they make; and which is worſe, without Repentance, render their Souls unworthy of an Admittance into the Kingdom of God hereafter. Oh! conſider in Time theſe dreadful Conſequences, and how much unlike our Chriſtian and high Profeſſion theſe Evils are, and how contrary to that excellent Precept of Chriſt, *viz.* * *Whatſoever ye would that Men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo to them.* And alſo to the Apoſtle's Exhortation, *viz.* † *Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatſoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God: Give none Offence, neither to the* Jews *or to the* Gentiles, *nor to the Church of God.*

Alſo, there is another Snare, which ſeems very prevalent in theſe our ſorrowful Times, eſpecially of late, *viz.* the *Contracting of Marriages with Perſons of different Perſwaſion in Point of Religion*, whereby many have laid a Foundation for laſting Repentance; divine Providence ſignally manifeſting his Diſpleaſure againſt ſuch unhappy and diſagree-

* Mat. vii. 12. † 1 Cor. x. 31, 32.

able

able Matches; for they, in their very Nature and Tendency, bring trouble into Society; Sorrow upon good Parents; Anguish upon the Party immediately concern'd; much Confusion, manifold Perplexities and Inconveniences into Families; and *lastly*, an almost irreparable Loss to their Off-spring, in Relation to their religious Education: Therefore, dearly Beloved, duly observe our dear Lord's excellent Precept, *Watch and pray that ye enter not into Temptation.* And that of the wise Man, *If Sinners entice thee, consent thou not*; *for*, as saith the Apostle, *evil Communications corrupt good Manners.* Moreover, ye *Fathers*, be good Way-marks to the *young People*: and ye, beloved *young People*, be good Patterns to the *Children*; and ye, tender *Children*, who have in some Degree happily known the *Father*, be ye good Examples in Word and Action to those dear little Babes and Lambs in the Flock, who as yet have known little or nothing of the Touches of the Love of the *Father* in their Hearts; that so each superior and more experienced Rank may say to the Inferior, *follow ye us as we follow Christ.*

Now, my well beloved Friends, both *Fathers*, *young Men* and *Children*, I must say unto you, that there are three Sorts of Professors of *Truth*, viz. *Libertines*, who dare

drink

drink to Excess, and gratifie their carnal Appetites, in Conformity to the Spirit of this World and the Vanities thereof. *Secondly*, Some like the *Laodiceans*, who shunning open Prophaneness and Vice, are pretty temperate, and just in their Dealings, Commerce and Converse amongst Men, who seem too much to center contented there, in a cool or lukewarm Frame of Mind, and not to come up in true Love to God, and Zeal for his divine Worship, which occasions a Deficiency, or Neglect sometimes, in attending Meetings for Worship; and at other times in not Attending at the Time *appointed*; and which is worse, in sitting there in a *dull*, *drowsy*, and *sleepy Disposition* of *Mind* and *Body*, to the great Shame and Scandal of our Profession and Society; it being absolutely repugnant to the Spirituality of that Gospel Worship we pretend to: Whence proceeds also a Dwarfishness and Shortness in keeping up the several Branches of our Christian Testimony, which *Truth* hath ever led the faithful Professors thereof to maintain; particulary that very material and important One against Paying or Receiving Tythe. Further, may we all consider that the same Grace and Truth which teacheth to live soberly and righteously, and that which bringeth thus far, instructeth, advanceth and carried on the Christian Scholar and Proficient, truly pressing after Perfection,

to

o live godly, *i. e.* religiouſly, and in Con-
ormity in Will and Deſire to the Will of
d; ſhort of which whoſo reſteth, be he
ever ſo regular in his viſible Conduct among
Men, or never ſo punctual in *meum* and
*um*, inevitably falls ſhort of fully anſwer-
ng the Requirings of the Almighty; for he
hat commands *to do juſtly and to love Mercy*,
lſo commands to walk *humbly with God*; and
hey, who by the Teaching of the Grace
f God, thus do and perſevere in Sobriety,
Righteouſneſs and Godlineſs, are of the
*bird* and beſt Sort of Profeſſors; and are
lone the Friends and thorough-paced
hriſtians, agreeable to the Words of Chriſt,
*Ye are my Friends, if you do whatſoever I*
*ommand you*. Such dare not content them-
elves in doing juſtly and loving Mercy on-
y, but are fervently engaged in Soul to pro-
eed in the ſacred Gradation, and run the
ace quite through to the End, *that is*, alſo
walk humbly with God; which will alone
ffectually prevent the many Evils and En-
rmities herein adviſed againſt, and alſo
mely prevent that ſcandalous and deteſt-
ble Evil of *Inſolvency* already hinted at,
hich hath too often brought Reproach on
ur Society, to the Sorrow of the Hearts
the Faithful. Finally, *dear Friends*, in
e Words of Chriſt to his Church, I once

* John xv. 14.

more

more intreat you: * *Rise up and come away, for lo the Winter is past, the Rain is over and gone; the Flowers appear on the Earth, the Time of Singing of Birds is come, and the Voice of the Turtle is heard in our Land; the Fig-tree putteth forth her green Figs, and the Vines with the tender Grapes give a good Smell: Arise —— and come away.* That as the *Psalmist* has it, † *That our Sons may be as Plants grown up in their Youth; that our Daughters may be as corner Stones, polished after the Similitude of a Palace.* That this may be the happy Effect of your Obedience, is the Prayer of your sincere Brother in the *Truth.*

From *Sutton Benjar* in *Wiltshire*,
the 12th of the 8th Month, 1738.

*David Hall.*

* Cant. ii. 10, 11, 12, 13. † Psal. cxliv. 12.

FINIS